

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8266
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
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AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY PARIS
USLO RIYADH
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 DAMASCUS 3206

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1,4
TAGS: PEPR, PLO, SY
SUBJECT: PLO INTERNAL DEBATES

1. SUMMARY: RECENT PLO CENTRAL COUNCIL MEETING AGREED
TO FOLLOWING KUWAITI PROPOSED OPTIONS FOR RESTORING ARAB
UNITY: (A) SADAT ABANDONS HIS DIRECT LINKS WITH ISRAEL OR
(B) SADAT IN THE NAME OF ARAB UNITY AGREES TO COMPLY WITH
AN ARAB SUMMIT REQUEST THAT LINKS WITH ISRAEL BE SEVERED.
IN NEITHER CASE WOULD PUBLIC SADAT MEA CULPA BE REQUIRED.

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COUNCIL MAY ALSO HAVE STIPULATED THAT SADAT MUST RESTORE
RELATIONS WITH SOVIET UNION. ACCORDING TO SEVERAL PLO
LEADERS, ARAFAT IS ENGAGED IN UNCHARACTERISTIC HOUSE CLEANING
IN FATAH AND IN EFFORT TO BRING OTHER ORGANIZATIONS UNDER
HIS CONTROL. HE IS BEING SUPPORTED BY SYRIA AND SAUDI
ARABIA. REJECTIONISTS AND SOME FATAH LEADERS ARE FIGHTING
BACK BUT ARAFAT IS IN STRONG POSITION. FROM SYRIAN VIEW-

POINT THIS MAY BE MIXED BLESSING. A STRONG ARAFAT CAN HELP BRING LEBANON SITUATION UNDER CONTROL, BUT IN THE LONG RUN SYRIA DOES NOT TRUST THE PLO LEADER AND PROBABLY DOES NOT WANT TO SEE HIS POSITION GROW TOO STRONG. END SUMMARY.

2. IN RECENT DAYS AUSTRALIAN EMBOFF HAS HAD MEETINGS WITH KHALID FAHUM, PRESIDENT OF THE PALESTINE NATIONAL COUNCIL, AND MUHAMMAD ZUHDI NASHASHIBI AND ABD AL-MUHSIN ABU MAYZAR, MEMBERS OF THE PLO EXCOMM, IN WHICH THEY DISCUSSED THE RECENT PLO CENTRAL COUNCIL MEETING AND INTERNAL CONFLICTS WITHIN THE PLO. THE CENTRAL COUNCIL MEETING, ACCORDING TO FAHUM, HAD BEEN DELAYED FOR 55 DAYS DUE TO A DISAGREEMENT WITHIN THE FATAH LEADERSHIP OVER HOW TO HANDLE THE SADAT INITIATIVE. THERE WERE SOME WHO WANTED TO MODERATE THE PLO'S HARDLINE STAND AGAINST SADAT'S EFFORTS. IN THE END FATAH AGREED TO ACCEPT EITHER OF TWO OPTIONS PROPOSED BY KUWAIT THROUGH PRESIDENT NUMAYRI: (1) THAT SADAT WOULD QUIETLY ABANDON HIS DIRECT CONTACTS WITH THE ISRAELIS AND AN ARAB SUMMIT WOULD MEET TO COORDINATE A NEW STRATEGY. SADAT WOULD NOT BE REQUIRED TO DISAVOW HIS PREVIOUS ACTIONS. (2) AN ARAB SUMMIT COULD BE HELD WHICH ASKED SADAT TO ABANDON HIS EFFORTS AND SADAT WOULD AGREE TO THIS REQUEST IN THE NAME OF ARAB UNITY. FAHUM SAID PRESIDENT AL-ASSAD ALSO AGREED TO THESE OPTIONS.

3. THIS PLO POSITION, ACCORDING TO FAHUM, WAS STRONGLY
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SUPPORTED BY YASSIR ARAFAT WHO IS A BIT FED UP WITH SADAT'S OBSTINANCY IN THE FACE OF ISRAELI INTRANSIGENCE. THE PLO CENTRAL COUNCIL APPROVED THE FATAH POSITION. HOWEVER, ABU MAYZAR SAID THAT AN ADDITIONAL POSITION WAS REQUIRED OF SADAT BY THE CENTRAL COUNCIL: THAT HE SEEK TO REPAIR HIS RUPTURED TIES WITH THE SOVIET UNION IN ORDER TO OPEN THE WAY FOR SOVIET MILITARY EQUIPMENT DELIVERIES TO EGYPT.

4. ABU MAYZAR SAID THAT THE CURRENT DEBATE WITH THE FIVE REJECTIONIST PALESTINIAN ORGANIZATIONS REGARDING PLO COOPERATIONS WITH UNIFIL AND INTERNAL ORGANIZATION WAS OVER TACTICS AND NOT STRATEGY. FATAH BELIEVED THAT THE UN OPERATION WOULD FAIL ON ITS OWN AND THAT THE PLO SHOULD NOT BE TAGGED IN THE WORLD'S EYES AS HAVING CAUSED THIS FAILURE. NEVERTHELESS, A DEEPER CAUSE FOR THE SPLIT APPEARS TO BE CONCERN OVER ARAFAT'S CURRENT UNCHARACTERISTIC AGGRESSIVE AND AUTOCRATIC RULE. FAHUM EXPLAINED THAT ARAFAT WAS FIRST CLEANING HOUSE WITHIN FATAH AND, AS A NEXT STEP, INTENDED TO BRING PDFLP NAYEF HAWATMEH UNDER CONTROL. HAWATMEH IS WELL AWARE OF ARAFAT'S INTENTIONS WHICH IS WHY HE CO-SPONSORED THE MEMORANDUM OF THE PALESTINIAN REJECTIONISTS CRITICIZING FATAH'S AUTOCRATIC DECISION MAKING PROCESS. HAWATMEH

IS TRYING TO PRESERVE HIS INDEPENDENCE OF ACTION.

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EXDIS

5. ABU MAYZAR GRUMBLED ABOUT ARAFAT'S CURRENT INCLINATION
TO MAKE DECISIONS ON HIS OWN WITHOUT REFERENCE TO OTHER
PALESTINIAN LEADERS (SUCH AS HIMSELF) AND SAID THAT
COLLEGIALITY HAS TO BE RESTORED. REGARDLESS OF ABU MAYZAR'S
CONCERN, WHICH WE GATHER IS SHARED BY MANY OTHER PLO
LEADERS, ARAFAT HOLDS ALL THE KEYS RIGHT NOW, ACCORDING TO
NASHASHIBI, AND IS IN A STRONG POSITION TO FOLLOW THROUGH
TO BRING THE BULK OF THE PALESTINIAN MOVEMENT UNDER CENTRALIZED
CONTROL. FAHUM SAID THAT ARAFAT HAS THE FULL BACKING OF PRESIDENT
ASSAD REGARDLESS OF THE LATTER'S PERSONAL DISTASTE FOR

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ARAFAT) AND OF SAUDI ARABIA. WITH THE SUPPORT OF THESE TWO STATES, COUPLED WITH HIS INCREASED CONTROL OVER FATAH, ARAFAT CANNOT BE SUCCESSFULLY CHALLENGED. SIMILAR REPORTS BY OTHER PLO LEADERS ABOUT INTERNAL MANEUVERS HAVE BEEN CONVEYED TO OUR FRENCH COLLEAGUES.

6. FAHUM WAS CONFIDENT THAT OVER THE NEXT TWO AND A HALF MONTHS BEFORE THE PALESTINIAN NATIONAL COUNCIL MEETING AUGUST 15, ASSUMING IT IS HELD AS SCHEDULED, ARAFAT WOULD BE ABLE TO INSURE THE VOTES NECESSARY TO SUPPORT HIS POSITION. FAHUM HINTED THAT ARAFAT WOULD SEEK A BROAD MANDATE AT THE PNC TO ENGAGE IN ANY POLITICAL ACTIVITY NECESSARY TO FURTHER THE INTERESTS OF THE PALESTINIAN CAUSE, INCLUDING ATTENDING A GENEVA CONFERENCE BASED ON RESOLUTION 242. THE PREVIOUS PNC MEETING PROHIBITED THE PLO FROM ATTENDING SUCH A MEETING. ALL THE PLO LEADERS WERE CRITICAL OF US POLICY IN THE AREA WHICH IGNORES THE PLO.

7. THE INTERNAL PLO SITUATION AS OUTLINED BY FAHUM AND NASHASHIBI APPEARS A BIT TOO SANGUINE TO US. PRESIDENT AL-ASSAD WILL SUPPORT ARAFAT INsofar AS HIS PROMISES TO HELP BRING THE SITUATION IN SOUTH LEBANON AND IN THE REST OF LEBANON UNDER CONTROL. THE CURRENT MOOD HERE OF RESTRAINED OPTIMISM THAT THE LEBANON PROBLEM MAY BE AMENABLE TO RESOLUTION IS PROBABLY BASED IN PART ON SUCH AN AGREEMENT. CERTAINLY, ASSAD WOULD LIKE TO SEE THE POSITIONS OF HABASH'S PFLP AND THE IRAQI ALF WEAKENED (ASSAD ARRESTED 20 HABASH SUPPORTERS IN A HOMS REFUGEE CAMP RECENTLY). NEVERTHELESS, IN THE LONG RUN, IT IS NOT IN ASSAD'S INTEREST TO HELP CREATE A MONOLITHIC PALESTINIAN ORGANIZATION UNDER ARAFAT WHOSE AFFINITIES FOR EGYPT MAKE HIM SUSPECT IN SYRIAN EYES. WHILE SAIQA LEADER ZUHAIR MUHSIN HAS BEEN KEEPING A SECRET

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RELATIVELY LOW PROFILE OF LATE (READ BY FAHUM AS AFURTHER SIGN OF SYRIAN SUPPORT FOR ARAFAT), MUHSIN HAS PUBLICLY SUPPORTED THE MEMORANDUM OF THE FIVE REJECTIONIST PALESTINIAN ORGANIZATIONS. MUHSIN HAS BEEN KNOWN TO ACT ON HIS OWN WITHOUT SYRIAN APPROVAL, BUT IT STRIKES US THAT ASSAD MIGHT NOT BE TOO DISPLEASED IF ARAFAT'S PRETENSIONS OF LEADERSHIP ARE KEPT WITHIN BOUNDS.
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